

From 4
MINISTERS¹⁴⁷⁹

OF THE

G O S P E L

CAUTIONED AGAINST

GIVING OFFENCE.

Some sentences omitted in the delivery of this sermon, and some which are now inserted in their proper places.
S E R M O N,

BY

JOHN ERSKINE, M.A.

One of the Ministers of EDINBURGH.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by SANDS, MURRAY, and COCHRAN.

For WILLIAM MILLER. MDCCLXIV.

[Price Sixpence.]

M I N I S T E R S

OF THE

G O V E R N M E N T

CAUTION AGAINST



G I V I N G

Some sentences omitted in the delivery, partly
through want of time, partly through forgetfulness,
are now inserted in their proper places.

B Y

J O H N F R S K I N E, M. A.

One of the Ministers of Education.

E D I N B U R G H :

Printed by S. J. MURRAY, and CO. GUTHRIE.

For WILLIAM MILLER, M.D.C.C.XIV.

[Price Shillings]

A S E R M O N,

PREACHED BEFORE

The Synod of LOTHIAN and TWEEDDALE,

At *Edinburgh*, November 8. 1763.

2 CORINTHIANS, vi. 3.

Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.

THESE words describe the behaviour of Paul, and of Timothy, his beloved son in the faith; and are intended, not only to do justice to their character, but to present gospel-ministers, in all ages, a fair pattern to copy after, if they would prosper in their arduous work. The conduct of these excellent men was, in the main, so circumspect and exemplary, that it could give no just cause of offence to Jews, to Gentiles, or to the churches of Christ. They carefully avoided whatever might increase the prejudices of unbelievers against the gospel, or might impair the reputation and success of their ministry, by laying a stumbling-block, or occasion of offence, in their brother's way.

I intend, in discoursing on this passage, first to explain the duty of giving no offence; then to inculcate upon myself and my brethren in the ministry the practice

tice of that duty ; and, lastly, to conclude with some practical reflections on what may be delivered.

I. I am to explain the duty here recommended to ministers, *Giving no offence.*

To preach and to act so as that, in fact, none shall be offended, would indeed be a hard, or rather impossible, task. We cannot govern the sentiments and passions of others ; and that can never be our duty which is wholly out of our power. The tastes of our hearers are so opposite, that what is relished by one set of them will necessarily disgust another. So changeable are the humours of not a few, that what yesterday they approved, to-morrow they condemn. The weak and captious will censure our not doing what was either impossible or unfit to be done. Not visiting the sick when we were altogether ignorant of their sickness ; visiting one person oftener than another ; preaching a little longer than usual, or a little shorter ; insisting often on subjects of general importance, or insisting seldom on subjects of less extensive use ; repeating the same sermon in different pulpits ; borrowing useful observations from the compositions of others ; refusing to spend that time in company, which duty requires us to devote to our studies : nay, circumstances still more insignificant than these ; our parentage ; our wealth ; our poverty ; our dress ; our necessary recreations ; every thing that relates to us ; every thing we say or do, however innocent ; every thing we omit, however needless, may, by one or other, be found fault with. To such trifles, triflers alone can constantly attend. If people will take offence

fence where no shadow of offence has been given, his soul must be groveling, and his time and pains poorly employed, who, in such low inconsiderable matters, can entirely guard against it. Even truth and holiness give offence. If any truth is contrary to generally-received opinions, many will be our enemies for telling them that truth. If vice is honestly reprov'd, the obstinate transgressor will be provoked. But if men take umbrage at us for doing our duty, it becomes us to offend man rather than God. When we hold on steadily in the paths of truth and righteousness, amidst these unjust reproaches, the testimony of God and of a good conscience will afford us unspeakable support and delight. The faithful minister, though reviled by an ungrateful generation, as a troubler of Israel, and a turner of the world upside down, is glorious in the eyes of the Lord. Though his character may, for a season, be under a cloud, God will at length bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day. It is evident, therefore, the duty of giving no offence, only means the giving no just cause of offence, by doing any thing unbecoming our profession as Christians, or our office as ministers of Christ. But it is proper to descend to particulars.

1. Our life and conversation should be inoffensive. Our station is elevated and conspicuous, and exposes us to the most strict and critical inspection. Many eyes are upon us, and the same allowances will not be made for our miscarriages as for those of others. Though we could speak with the tongues of men and angels, we shall hardly charm our hearers into a life

of piety, and convince them that religion is beautiful, unless we exhibit her beauties in a regular well-ordered conversation. A dissolute life cannot fail to make us base in the sight of the people. When our practice is manifestly inconsistent with our doctrines, the brightest parts will not protect our character, the finest accomplishments will not screen us from deserved reproach.

Nor is it enough, that we are not chargeable with scandalous wickedness. If we indulge ourselves in practices of a suspicious nature; venture to the utmost bounds of what is lawful; needlessly frequent the company of scoffers at religion; or, at least, spend more of our leisure-hours with the gay and thoughtless, than with sober serious Christians; if our conduct indicates a crafty, political, intriguing spirit; if we discover no relish for retirement; are often and unnecessarily in the tavern, seldom in the closet; and reserve little of our time for reading, meditation, and prayer; if a word scarce ever drops from us in ordinary conversation, that can either instruct or edify, we transgress the precept of giving no offence. With whatever force of argument, and seeming warmth, we recommend from the pulpit heavenly-mindedness and devotion, humility, self-denial, weanedness from the world, uprightness and integrity, the careful improvement of time, and a tender circumspect life, few who observe our behaviour will be charitable, or rather, will be blind enough, to fancy us in earnest. The judicious will shrewdly suspect that pleasure, gain, or honour, is dearer to us than God's glory and the salvation of souls. Good men will be offended; and even bad men,

men, whatever they pretend, will, in their hearts, despise us. We move in a more exalted sphere than others; and if we would shine as lights of the world, had need to avoid every appearance of evil, and to consider well, not only what is just and pure, but what is lovely and of good report. The world expects that we should do honour to our profession, act up to the dignity of our character, and, with the great apostle of the Gentiles, magnify our office, by acquiring, cultivating, and exercising every accomplishment, gift, and grace, that tends to promote our usefulness in the church of Christ. Many things, abstractly considered, may be lawful, which yet are not expedient, and edify not. Duty indeed sometimes obliges us to contradict the humours of our people. But it is neither acting a wise nor a good part to contradict them for contradiction's sake. In matters indifferent, we should become all things to all men, that we may gain the more; and deny ourselves the use of our lawful liberty, when, by indulging it, our brother would be stumbled, or offended, or made weak.

2. We should give no offence by chusing injudiciously the subjects of our sermons. When we preach what is the result of mere human reason, or teach for doctrines the commandments of men; when we urge uncertain speculations as warmly as if salvation depended on the belief of them; puzzle our hearers with new schemes unsupported by scripture-evidence, or, by forced unnatural interpretations, torture the inspired writings to speak our mind; when the things we teach, though possibly true in themselves, yet are not important religious truths, explained and enforced
in

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in a scriptural strain : we practically declare, by such a conduct, that we have no high esteem for divine revelation, and have forgot our commission as ambassadors of Christ. It would be reckoned arrogant presumption, even in the ambassador of an earthly prince, should he exceed his instructions, and betake himself to his own sagacity, in adjusting the differences of his sovereign with neighbouring states. And can an ambassador commissioned by him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, be thus unfaithful, without the most daring and impious insolence ? He bids fairest to preach with success, who preaches in words, not of man's wisdom, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. The blessed Spirit sets his seal only to doctrines stamped with his own authority, and which flow from that sacred fountain unfullied and pure. The gospel, when mingled with human inventions, loses much of its native lustre, and, like adulterated milk, affords but scanty and unwholesome nourishment. An itch to say what is curious and uncommon, is a dangerous turn of mind in a teacher of Christianity. Common truths are like common blessings ; of most use, and of truest worth : and that is the best sermon which makes the grace of God sweet, salvation through Christ acceptable, sin ugly and hateful, and holiness amiable to the soul.

If they give just ground of offence who add to the word of God, they do it also who take from it. All God's words are right. There is nothing froward or perverse in them. Every doctrine and precept is wisely suited to promote God's glory and man's salvation,

AGAINST GIVING OFFENCE. 7

tion, and was mercifully revealed for that very purpose. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Those entertain too high a conceit of their own penetration, and very mean ideas of the divine wisdom, who fancy it dangerous to preach what the blessed Spirit judged it proper to reveal. If we would keep back from our people nothing profitable, we must endeavour to declare to them the whole counsel of God. Concealing any part of that form of sound words which our commission directs us to publish, is unfaithfulness to God, and injustice to the souls of men. "He," saith God, "that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully;" Jer. xxiii. 28. And again: "—all the words that I command thee to speak unto them, diminish not a word;" Jer. xxvi. 2.

As wise and faithful stewards, we must regard the whole family, and give to every one his proper portion: teaching the young and ignorant, in a plain familiar manner, the first principles of the oracles of God; and dispensing strong meat to them of full age, who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. The erroneous, we must endeavour, by sound reasoning, to convince of their mistakes. We must unfold the strictness, spirituality, and extent of God's law; and display the awful sanctions that enforce it, to rouse from their spiritual lethargy, the secure and thoughtless, the bold and presumptuous, the proud and self-confident: awakened souls we must gently allure to Christ, by the sweet and free invitations of the gospel; and believers we must

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must exhort, by a faithful discharge of every duty, to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.

Perhaps it is one chief occasion of our giving offence, by not declaring the whole counsel of God, that there are certain subjects peculiarly easy and agreeable to us, which, on that account, we are apt to imagine the most important, and to insist upon the most frequently. Lecturing usually on large portions of scripture might be some remedy to this evil. Occasions would, in that way, soon present, of explaining every doctrine, and inculcating every duty. Both we and our hearers would grow better acquainted with the lively oracles, and learn to read them more profitably. Besides, short occasional hints, which naturally arise in our ordinary course of expounding a gospel or epistle, may fall with weight on our hearers ere they are aware, and force conviction. Whereas, when the subject of a sermon is directly levelled against vulgar prejudices or fashionable vices, instantly the alarm is taken, and the mind strengthens itself against evidence. The heart is a fort more easily taken by sap than by storm.

But though we give hints of every truth, our sermons will offend the judicious, if we insist most frequently and earnestly on subjects of lesser importance, and more sparingly and coldly on those branches of Christianity which are most frequently introduced, and have the greatest stress laid upon them, in the sacred writings. Our great business is, to instruct guilty creatures how they may be recovered from the ruins of their apostasy, serve God acceptably here, and enjoy him for ever hereafter. It is justly offensive, if we content
ourselves

ourselves with now and then mentioning, in a slight and overly manner, those things which affect the very vitals of our common Christianity.

If Christ, and salvation through him, are rarely preached, this will be quite opposite to the apostolic pattern. Let it not be pleaded, That these doctrines were more necessary to Jews and Heathens than to professed Christians. A little observation may convince us, that many of our hearers are Christians only in name, and need to be taught these doctrines more perfectly, or, at least, to have deeper impressions of their truth and importance. Besides, it was not barely in addressing infidels, that the apostles insisted on such subjects. They did it also in their epistles to the saints and faithful in Jesus, who knew these things, and were established in the present truth. A considerable part of many of these epistles immediately relates to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. And, in the practical part of them, these peculiar doctrines are often urged as motives even to social and relative duties. For instance, they are urged to dissuade from evil-speaking, and to recommend meekness and gentleness, Tit. iii. 2. & *seqq.* : and in the 8th verse of that chapter, the apostle, after pronouncing the doctrine of justification through Christ *a faithful saying*, in-joins Titus to affirm it constantly, in order to excite believers to carefulness in maintaining good works. But I have a still higher pattern to plead: More of our Lord's sermons are recorded by the beloved disciple than by the other evangelists; and of these the principal subjects are, the dangerous state of the unconverted, and the nature, necessity, and blessed

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consequences

consequences of faith in Christ, of union with him, and of the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. The last and longest of these sermons, though preached to the apostles only, who had long ago professed their dependence on him as their guide to eternal life, yet chiefly relates to the mutual love of Christ and his people, and the safety and comfort that flow from the exercise of faith in him. The doctrine of Christ crucified is the instituted mean for producing and nourishing the divine life, and should be the centre of our sermons, in reference to, and dependence upon which, other subjects ought to be considered.

The nature of true religion, as distinguished from every counterfeit appearance, the genuine workings of it in the heart, and the fruits of it in the life, are subjects that need to be often explained and inculcated. Scripture abounds with occasional instructions on these heads: and the 119th psalm, our Lord's sermon on the mount, the epistle of James, and John's first epistle, treat them designedly, and at full length. On the one hand, we must inculcate it frequently, that however blameless mens outward conduct appear, yet if they act barely from selfish interested principles, and have not charity, love to God, to Christ, and to their brethren of mankind, they are nothing, have not the spirit of Christ in them, and are none of his: "The end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." In other words, The end of divine revelation is not gained upon us, till we love our duty, see a beauty and excellency in holiness, and esteem it our meat and drink to do the will of our heavenly Father. On the other hand,

hand, we must remind our hearers, that where the tree is good, the fruit also will be good; and that no pretences to faith or love are well founded, which do not justify themselves by a suitable practice. Nor must we content ourselves with general encomiums on holiness and good works. It is necessary minutely to describe the various graces of the Spirit that constitute the Christian temper, and the various duties we owe to God, our neighbours, and ourselves. We do not comply with the precepts of the apostles, and imitate their example, in speaking the things that become sound doctrine, unless we inculcate upon our hearers the particular obligations that result from their different ages, stations, and relations; Tit. ii. 1. 2. For vice, as well as error, is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God; 1 Tim. i. 9. — 11.

Further, we give offence, if we do not insist on subjects suited to the spiritual state of our flocks, and to the dispensations of providence towards them. In many discourses, the counsel is good, but not for the time. Whereas, a well-timed discourse bids fairest to strike and edify. There is also a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak. In many cases, we will instruct and admonish in vain, if we stay not till mens minds are calm, composed, and in proper temper to give us a fair hearing. Paul would not feed with strong meat those who were not able to bear it. On some occasions, an oblique hint will irritate more than a severe undisguised reproof would do at another season.

It is evident, from what has been said, that the mat-

ter of his sermons must needs give offence, whose ideas of the great truths of Christianity are superficial, confused, and indistinct. Men must have knowledge ere they impart it; and there is one only source whence divine knowledge, without danger of mistake, can be derived, and where it is the duty and interest of the minister of Christ, with the utmost diligence, to dig for it. Let the writings of philosophers, of historians, and of politicians, be their study whose business it is to unfold the secrets of nature, to transmit to posterity the memorable deeds of heroes, or to give counsel to their sovereign in matters of state. These branches of knowledge are at best ornamental, not essential, to a teacher of Christianity. He may innocently, nay, usefully, amuse himself with them; but he cannot, without sacrilege, devote to them the greatest part of his time. His office is, to make known to perishing sinners the sublime, the affecting, the comforting truths of the lively oracles; and for that end, attentively to read them, to meditate on them day and night; and whilst he despises not the labours of able and worthy men, who have endeavoured to illustrate them, to secure a better and more effectual help, by humbly and fervently imploring the Father of lights, to open his eyes to behold wondrous things out of God's word. Thus shall he become a scribe instructed into the kingdom of God, and, like unto a man that is an householder, bring forth out of his treasures things new and old.

3. When ministers give no offence by the subjects of their sermons, they may give a great deal by their manner of handling them. Particularly,

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When they preach not in a manner calculated to inform the judgment. Men are rational creatures, and, if we would address them as such, the understanding should, as the leading power, be first applied to. For this purpose, we must clearly open and explain the truth, confirm it by arguments level to the capacities of our hearers, and do all this in plain familiar language, which even those in low life may easily understand. Christianity was designed for the peasant as well as the philosopher. And, as the learned and wise make a small proportion of most congregations, to preach it in a way in which only they are like to be the better for it, is highly offensive. Philosophy, though from the press it has done religion substantial service; yet, when often introduced in the pulpit, generally hurts it, by usurping the place of what would be more useful, and probably more acceptable too. Scholastical niceties, metaphysical distinctions, and a fine subtle thread of reasoning, may indeed sometimes be necessary in answering metaphysical objections against religion; and therefore, on some rare occasions, the use of them in the pulpit may be profitable. But the bulk of audiences are incapable of following a long and intricate train of thought; and therefore will be confounded by it, not instructed and convinced. While some may applaud such sermons as deep and rational, the more wise will despise them as idle and injudicious. This, however, is no apology for any who verge to the opposite extreme, slight order and exactness in their compositions, and, instead of keeping close to a subject, entertain their hearers with confused incoherent discourses, empty
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of sentiment, but full of insipid repetitions, and impertinent rambling excursions.

I say nothing of those, whose long perplexed periods, occasioned by unnecessary epithets and expletives, and parenthesises, and digressions, render their sermons at once tedious and obscure. This unhappiness of style is remarkable in some who stand in the first rank of genius and penetration; who exerting thought more intensely than others, had little attention to spare for expression. Their fault is more voluntary, and therefore more offensive, who by a false affectation of the elegant or the sublime, soar aloft, above the comprehension of their hearers. Bombast descriptions, glittering flowers of eloquence, and luxuriant flights of wit, had better be left to the heroes of romance*. Sermons composed in such a style, may indeed entertain and amuse; but they want perspicuity, the very first and fundamental excellency of speech. Even the justest metaphors, when too much crowded, enervate a discourse; darken, instead of illustrating, the sense; and, to use the words of another, resemble the windows in old cathedrals, in which the painting keeps out the light. I acknowledge, the best sentiments, if conveyed in mean and low images, and cloathed in a rustic slovenly dress, provoke laughter in some, and occasion uneasiness in others: but we need not run into a finical nicety of style, in order to avoid a sordid negligence.

* Hervey of the church of England, and Maccwen of the Secession, are agreeable writers. But to attempt their manner is dangerous, without an uncommonly lively imagination, solid judgment, and correct taste. Luxuriancies of style, generally overlooked in original geniuses, appear ridiculous in their servile imitators.

AGAINST GIVING OFFENCE. 1

Still more offensive than these, is an obscurity affected for its own sake. It must offend every honest man, if, to conceal unpopular opinions, and to put on an air of orthodoxy, we use expressions which may be interpreted, with equal ease, to divers, and even contrary purposes. Remarkable are the words of Paul, 1 Cor. xiv. 8. 9. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak to the air." If this is a good argument against preaching in an unknown tongue, it is equally good against every thing else that disguises, instead of unfolding our sentiments of Christianity. The apostles used great plainness of speech; and it is an apostolical injunction, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Let his style be plain and clear, like that of the sacred writings; not dark and ambiguous, like the oracles of the Heathen*.

After all, informing the judgment, though the first part of our work, is far from the whole of it. Sermons will do little service, if they are not also calculated to command a reverend attention, to strike the conscience, and to warm and affect the heart. We speak as ministers of God; and therefore it becomes us to speak with dignity and boldness, not fearing the face of man. Favour should not bribe, nor frowns nor dangers af-

* It was justly observed of the council of Trent, "*Nosti artificia horum hominum; vix unquam aliquid aperte dicunt, vix unquam simpliciter: et cum ceteri homines loquantur ut intelligi possint, isti nihil magis volunt quam ne intelligantur.*" *Pibraci epistola ad Hospitalium, apud Courayer, in notis ad Fr. Pauli hist. Conc. Trid. t. 1. p. 368. edit. Lond.* Too many Protestants have imitated them in this.

fright

fright us, from delivering our master's message. I mean not to vindicate pride or passion. A proper decorum should be observed, especially in administering reproof. It is not fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked, or to princes, Ye are ungodly. Persons in public characters must be treated with a deference suited to their station; and even the meanest must not be insulted. Courage, however, and faithfulness, are by no means inconsistent with meekness and discretion. And if the greatest dare grossly and openly to transgress, the minister of Christ should dare to reprove.

Besides the meanness of some, in conniving at fashionable vices, there are others, whose thoughtless unconcerned gesture and pronunciation greatly diminish the dignity of their pulpit-performances, and make them received with indifference, perhaps indignation, instead of respect. A light and merry air, an antic jovial carriage, in executing the weighty commission with which God has intrusted us, is contrary to the rules of decency, and cannot fail to prejudice the hearers. It is impossible to be too grave and serious in addresses, on the success of which the happiness of immortal souls in so great a measure depends.

But though our language is plain and elegant, our method accurate, and our manner grave and solemn; yet, if our discourses are flat and lifeless, they will seldom warm the heart. Mr Melmoth has observed, that in Archbishop Tillotson's sermons, a pathetic animated address is often wanting, even on occasions when naturally we would have expected most of it. Abundance of spirit, however, appears in some of his discourses, especially in exposing the absurdities and
impieties

impieties of the church of Rome. And it might have been remarked with equal justice, that numerous volumes of sermons published in England since that time, while inferior to the Archbishop's in many genuine beauties of style, resemble them only in that languid manner of which Melmoth complains. Alas! my brethren, dull and pointless arrows are ill suited to pierce the conscience of hardened sinners. Soft and drowsy harangues, instead of rousing a secure generation; will rather increase their spiritual lethargy; and a cold preacher will soon have a cold auditory. Jesus has intrusted us with the concerns of his people, a people dearly bought, and greatly beloved; we have to do with souls, that must be happy or miserable for ever; we address them, in the name of God, upon matters of infinite importance: and is it not an indignity to him whose ambassadors we are, to execute our commission coolly, and as if half asleep? Will it not tempt others to slight our message, if, by the manner of delivering it, we appear to slight it ourselves? When our own hearts are most impressed with the inestimable worth of immortal souls; when out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; when our sentiments, style, voice, and gesture, discover how much we are in earnest; then we are most likely to touch the hearts of our hearers, and make them feel the force of what we say.

I have said so much upon preaching, as there are more directions and exhortations in scripture with relation to it than with relation to any other branch of our office, I must barely hint the remaining particulars,

lars, lest I inroach too far on your time and patience.

4. We may give offence, not only by an improper manner of preaching, but by a neglect or undue performance of the other public offices of our station.

In leading the devotions of the church, we give offence, when either the matter, expression, or manner, is unsuitable; when we are long and tedious; mingle our own passions and prejudices with our addresses to God; introduce disputable matters, in which many sincere Christians cannot join with us; when we adapt not our prayers to the particular circumstances and necessities of our people; hurry them over carelessly; discover no becoming seriousness and solemnity of spirit, no realizing sense of the value of the blessings for which we plead; and when we seem to forget that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, through whom alone our guilty race can obtain access to God, and acceptance with him.

It is just cause of offence, and, did vital piety flourish, would be offensive to our people, that the Lord's supper is so seldom dispensed. And as our manner of dispensing that ordinance is one chief hindrance of its frequency, it is worthy our inquiry, how far that also is blameable. Undoubtedly we give offence, if, for trifling unwarrantable causes, we put off administering it; or if we usurp the prerogative of Christ, as sole lawgiver of the church, by making the terms of Christian communion either wider or narrower than he has made them.

And this leads me to observe, that as the discipline of the church is in part committed to us, we give offence if we exercise it with respect of persons; and,
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through a mistaken tenderness for any, or a fear of incurring their displeasure, allow them to live without due censure, in the open practice of scandalous crimes, instead of rebuking them with authority, that others also may fear. At the same time, we give offence, if we claim a right to judge them that are without. It is an offence against common sense, to expel men from a society to which they never seemed to belong, and to debar them from privileges, to which they never had, or pretended to have, any title.

Probably some or other might be offended, and none greatly edified, should I say much on our conduct in judicatures. Of this subject much has been said from the pulpit, and, on occasions too, where no purpose of edification could be gained by saying any thing. This much, however, may, I hope, be said, without impropriety, on such an occasion: To act a juggling unsteady part, and, from connections of any kind, to vary from our professed principles; to sneak, and cringe, and prostitute our consciences, either to the humours of the great, or to the prejudices of the populace; to behave with insolence to men our superiors in age and experience; to listen with avidity to one side of a question, while we deny a fair and full hearing to the other; to silence sober reasoning by raillery, by dark malicious innuendoes, by bitter satirical invectives, or by noisy cries for a vote; to treat one another with harshness and severity for different sentiments and different conduct in matters of doubtful disputation, cannot fail to offend every cool and impartial observer. Nor can it, I think, be disputed, that we give offence, if we examine slightly the opi-

nions, dispositions, and abilities of those we recommend to important offices; and solemnly attest, that men have qualifications, which either we know that they want, or at least know not that they have.

In ordaining to the ministry, we act in the name of Christ; and therefore give offence if we act against his authority, or without it. Genius, learning, prudence, aptness to teach, are all necessary parts of furniture for a minister; and, in ordinary cases, without some measure of them, none ought to be set apart to that honourable service. But the most eminent gifts and abilities, when grace does not direct the proper use of them, may too probably qualify men to be plagues instead of blessings to the church of God. Jesus would not commit his sheep to Peter, till he had answered satisfyingly the question, " Lovest thou me ? " He who knows all things, knew the love of his disciple; and therefore thus inquired, chiefly for our sakes, that in committing to others the ministry of reconciliation, we should follow his steps. They who have seen Christ's beauty, tasted his love, and felt the pleasures and advantages of religion, are peculiarly qualified, by this their Christian experience, to recommend them to others with dignity and freedom. Singular activity is requisite in the many labours, and singular fortitude and firmness of mind in the many difficulties and afflictions to which faithful ministers are exposed. Now, love, and love alone, will reconcile to these; nay, render them a delight. Untender, therefore, and unkind, we are to the feeble flock of Christ, if we commit them to men who, for aught we know or care, bear them no affection; and probably, instead of feeding

feeding and defending them, may poison them, or expose them to be devoured. None will presume thus to plead before Christ in the great day of account: "It is true, we intrusted souls, dear in thy sight, and for whom thou didst shed thy precious blood, to one whose conduct seemed to discover, that his natural enmity to thee remained unsubdued. But he was an agreeable companion, a man of strong natural powers, and an accomplished orator." If such a plea would be absurd, must not that conduct be absurd which requires it? We are not indeed to seek, for we cannot obtain, an absolute certainty that those we ordain are lovers of Jesus. It is God's prerogative to search the heart; and the judgment we form, on the most probable evidence, may prove wrong. But it is enough to warrant our act, if there is a profession of real religion, and an outward conduct in some measure agreeable to that profession: and, without doubt, different sentiments of a candidate, and different opportunities of knowing him thoroughly, may justify some in bearing a part in his ordination, when it would be in others presumptuous wickedness. There is one thing more in our ordinations, which, I think, merits our serious attention; and that is, the solemnly giving to one, in the name of Jesus, the charge of a congregation unwilling to submit to him, and among whom there is no probability of his usefulness*. Upon what principles this can be vindicated, I am yet to learn.

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* The zeal of Passius, canon of Valentia, out-ran his knowledge, when he maintained in the council of Trent, That it was a devilish pestilent invention of late heretics, destructive of faith and of the church

The state must no doubt determine what shall be the established religion, and who shall be intitled to the legal benefice for teaching it: but no government ought, and our government does not attempt, to impose upon any, either a religion or an instructor in religion. It is still more difficult to conceive, why a conscientious scruple to bear a part in an ordination, the form of which seems to assert a falsehood, should exclude a man, otherwise qualified, from serving God in the gospel of his Son. I have seen no act of parliament, or constitution of the church of Scotland, that enjoins this. Sure I am, it is not enjoined by Christian forbearance and love.

5. We give offence, by the neglect or undue performance of the more private duties of our calling.

If we pay no regard to the souls of our charge, unless in the pulpit, and immediate preparation for it; if we seem indifferent how we stand in the esteem and affection of our people, or what is the success of our labours; if we use not every proper method for conveying and cherishing religious impressions, for preventing backslidings, and for recovering those that have fallen, from their spiritual decays; if we neglect to warn the unruly, to comfort them that mourn, to

church of God, to ascribe to any claim of right the voice or consent allowed the people in the choice of their pastors; which was a mere favour, revocable at pleasure. Yet he certainly argued consistently, in insisting, that those passages should be expunged from the pontifical, which seem to suppose such consent necessary; particularly where the bishop says, in ordaining a presbyter, "*Non frustra a patribus institutum, ut de electione eorum qui ad regimen altaris adhibendi sunt, consulatur et populus; quia necesse est, ut facilius ei quis obedientiam exhibeat ordinato, cui assensum præbuerit ordinando.*"

visit

visit the afflicted; and to catechize the young and ignorant, when we have any probable prospect that these services may be useful; or if we manage our visits to the sick so uncautiously, that bystanders are encouraged to put off thoughts of repentance to their last moments, and thereby sustain a hurt which any good done to the dying will seldom balance; we greatly fail of our duty, and are guilty of giving offence.

II. I now proceed briefly to enforce the exhortation of giving no offence.

The text itself suggests a powerful argument: If we give offence, the ministry will be blamed. The people of God will justly be angry with us, and condemn our faulty conduct. Nay, possibly, all our future ministrations will, in their eyes, become hateful or contemptible; and thus a fair prospect of usefulness be unhappily blasted. Though a man could speak like an oracle, little regard will be paid to what he says when his credit is sunk.

Nor is this the worst: the ungodly confine not their censures to the weak or worthless minister; but, as though one clergyman stood representative of all, take occasion, from his licentiousness or imprudence, to traduce ministers in general as fools or knaves. In every place there are subtle emissaries of Satan, who incessantly watch for our halting, and take a handle, from the least misbehaviour of which we are guilty, to reflect on the most innocent of our brethren. The enemies of Jesus are fond of every thing that can expose our order: and if our conduct is profligate, or our pulpit-compositions despicable, that affords them
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the wished-for pretext to gratify their malice. The cry is, They are all alike. Nay, it is well if the sacred office itself be not aspersed, and the wisdom of God who instituted it arraigned. Thus, when we depart out of the way, it causes many to stumble at the law, and to abhor the offering of the Lord. Jesus himself is crucified afresh, and his holy religion reproached through our faults, unjustly imputed to them. We are ambassadors for Christ; and by our ill management of that trust, disgrace is reflected on him in whose name we act, the cause of God suffers, the hearts of the godly are grieved, the wicked are hardened in their wickedness, and precious souls eternally perish. Wo to the world because of offences. It must needs be that offences come; but wo to the man, double wo to the minister, by whom they come: it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the depths of the sea. Though his heavenly Master, who invested him with so honourable an office, is present, and observes his conduct, he dares to be indolent in his service, and basely to betray his interest. He scruples not the most direct and horrible perjury, by violating the solemn engagements he came under, to take heed to the flock of which he was ordained an overseer. He feels no remorse for offending the Sovereign of Zion, by a neglect of duty, and a breach of trust, which, in his own servant, or in the servant of an earthly sovereign, would have appeared to him infamous and detestable. But possibly, when death is about to seal the eyes of his body, the eyes of his soul may be opened to perceive things as they really are. After having spent his
life

life in doing the work of the Lord deceitfully, and pursuing the honours, riches, and pleasures of this world, not the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, methinks I see him receive the awful summons, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou must be no longer steward. He feels himself about to be dragged to a state of misery, eternal and intolerable. Conscience awakes from its fatal slumber, and by the most cruel and unsupportable reproaches, avenges his contempt of its old and long-forgotten remonstrances. His wonted arts of stilling this inward tormentor, now lose their power. Fearfulness and trembling come upon him, and horror overwhelms him. Hell is as naked before him, and destruction without a covering. And God, justly provoked, laughs at his calamity, and mocks when his fear cometh. Yet, possibly, another, equally unfaithful, may have no bonds in his death, and leave this world as he lived in it, thoughtless of God and duty, and regardless of eternity. But if dying does not, surely death shall put an end to his peace. See him appearing before the tribunal of a now inexorable judge. Behold his countenance changed, his thoughts troubling him, the joints of his loins loosed, and his knees smiting one against another; when, lo! a voice more dreadful than thunder thus accosts him: "Wicked and slothful servant, what hadst thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth; seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?" Mark a numerous flock ruined by his negligence or bad example. Listen to them calling for vengeance. The cry of their blood enters into the ears

of the Lord of Sabaoth ; and the irreverfible doom is pronounced, “ Take him, bind him hand and foot, “ caft him into utter darknefs ; there fhall be weeping, “ and wailing, and gnafhing of teeth.”

Turn away from this fhocking fcene, and obferve on the right hand of the Son of man a faithful pafter. Poffibly his dying words were words of triumph and tranfport : “ This is my rejoicing, the testimony of “ my confcience, that in fimplicity and godly fincerity, “ not with flefhly wifdom, but by the grace of God, “ I have had my converfation in the world. I have “ fought a good fight, I have finifhed my courfe, “ I have kept the faith. Henceforth is laid up for “ me a crown of righteoufnefs, which the Lord, the “ righteous judge, fhall give me at that day : and not “ to me only, but to all them alfo that love his ap- “ pearing.” But with what fuperior joy does he lift up his head, when he refts from his labours, when his warfare is accomplifhed, and the day of his complete redemption dawns ! He walked with God in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. Thefe he now prefents to the Great Shepherd of the fheep, faying, “ Behold me, and the children thou haft “ given me.” He is their rejoicing, and they alfo are his rejoicing, in the day of the Lord Jefus. Joyful to both was the found of the gospel : but more joyful, now, is the final fentence, “ Well done, good and “ faithful fervant ; thou haft been faithful over a few “ things, I will make thee ruler over many things : “ enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

If, therefore, we have any zeal for the glory of God, if any regard for the intereft of the Redeemer’s kingdom,

kingdom, if any tender concern for the salvation of our hearers, and if, in the great day of the Lord, we would not be found among them that offend, and work iniquity, and after having prophesied in Christ's name, hear him pronounce against us the dreadful sentence, "Depart from me; I know you not." Let us take heed to ourselves, and to our doctrine, and walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise; giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.

IT is now time to hasten to a conclusion. If it is our duty to give no offence, how difficult then is our office! what superior accomplishments, natural and acquired, what exalted improvements in vital piety, what continual aids of the Holy Spirit, are requisite to preserve from giving offence in any thing, men exposed to such a variety of temptations and snares! The best of us have cause, with grief and self-abasement, to acknowledge, that in many things we daily offend. Let us not, however, sink into slothfulness and despair. God's grace will be sufficient for us, if we humbly implore it, and he will perfect strength in our weakness. Say not, O humble servant of Christ, I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that God shall send thee; and whatsoever he commandeth thee, thou shalt speak. What he has done for many others, may greatly encourage our prayers and endeavours. We have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what burning and shining lights have gone before us in the work of the Lord. We have heard of their holy exemplary lives; their strict discipline, both in their own families and in the church of God; the gravity,

may, dignity, of their appearance; their animated penetrating sermons, and their edifying manner in familiar discourse. May a double portion of their excellent spirit rest upon us who come after them! And when, from time to time, our fathers are stripped of their priestly robes, may the sons of the prophets who stand up in their room, even exceed them in knowledge of divine things, in piety, in wisdom, in diligence, in success! that thus our holy religion may descend uncorrupted to distant ages, and the people which shall be created may praise the Lord.

I have been exhorting myself and my Reverend fathers and brethren, not to give offence. It is equally necessary to exhort you, our hearers, not to be hasty in taking it. Be tender, my friends, of our reputation. If any thing is insinuated to our disadvantage, be not rash and easy in believing it. If the charge is not supported by sufficient evidence, regard it not. Against an elder receive not an accusation under two or three witnesses. By wounding our good name, you render our ministry despicable and unsuccessful; than which nothing can be more pleasing to Satan, or hurtful to your own eternal interests. Judge not our cause, till you have given it a fair impartial hearing. Pass no sentence against us, till you know we have done what is alledged, and till you also know we had no good reason for doing it. And since God instructs you by men of like passions and infirmities with yourselves, expect not from them angelical perfection. Make candid allowances for those errors and frailties that are incident to the wisest and best of men. Throw over them the veil of charity. Do not form a judgment

ment of our general character from one unguarded word or action. God hath threatened, that those shall be cut off that watch for iniquity; that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate. You expect we should give no offence by the neglect of our duty: we, with the same justice, expect, that you should give no offence by the neglect of yours; and offence you give us, if you do not attend our ministerial instructions, implore the blessing of God upon them, and actually improve by them. If many professed Christians spent not more time in censuring ministers than in praying for them, the ministry in this land would be less blamed than it is at present, and probably less blameworthy too. Mean time, what is amiss in our conduct, will be no excuse for despising the message we bring in the name of Jesus, and persisting in impenitence and unbelief.

If an inoffensive ministry is thus important, how careful should patrons be to present, and parishes still enjoying the important privilege of election, to call none to the pastoral office, who may be in danger of giving offence by their weak abilities, unsound principles, or dissolute lives! ---- And how foolish and criminal a part do candidates act, who hastily rush into the sacred function, ere they have laid in the necessary furniture for discharging it honourably! Is there not cause to fear, that not their character only, but religion in general, may suffer for the reproach of their youth?

Upon the whole, would we give no offence as Men, as Christians, as Ministers of Christ? let us search out the sins and infirmities to which we are chiefly liable, that

30 MINISTERS CAUTIONED, &c.

that we may guard against these with peculiar care. In order to discover our weak side, let us duly regard the opinion others entertain of us. Let us not interpret friendly admonition as a disparagement and affront, but thankfully receive it, as a mark of unfeigned affection. Say, with David, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be as excellent oil which shall not break my head." We are often blind to our own failings; and happy are we, if we can engage some wise and good man, who tenderly regards our welfare, to point them out. But if we find none thus faithful and honest, let us wisely improve the accusations of enemies, and learn from them those blemishes and defects, to which, without the help of such ill-natured monitors, we might have remained strangers.

May we all, whether in public or private stations, be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, shining as lights in the world, maintaining always consciences void of offence towards God and towards man. And may the Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. Let him not leave us nor forsake us, that he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his holy commandments for ever.

APPEN.

APPENDIX.

[The preceding sermon having been first preached at an ordination, the charges then delivered to the minister and congregation are here subjoined.]

Charge to the MINISTER.

THough giving the usual charge would have better become one or other of our venerable fathers, yet, since the place where I stand requires it, suffer me, Reverend Sir, to be your monitor. Providence has called you to an honourable, but at the same time a difficult office. Gifts are necessary to capacitate you for it; grace, to animate you to discharge it faithfully. A small measure of gifts, and low attainments in grace, will poorly answer these important purposes. If you would be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work, covet earnestly the best gifts; the gift of knowledge, the gift of utterance, the gift of prudence. Lift up your heart to the Father of lights, in humble fervent supplication, that he would plentifully pour out upon you these, and every other good and perfect gift: and as they are not now imparted miraculously, but acquired through the blessing of God on the use of means, join to your prayers, diligent application to study. Meditate on divine things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all. Those of the most extensive knowledge, know only in part, and need to learn the way of God more perfectly. Give attendance to reading. Make a wise choice of the books you read.

read. Study those most which most tend to increase in you the dispositions and abilities proper for your office. There is one book, or rather collection of books, which, without an appearance of arrogance, I may venture to recommend, as of all others the best; I need not say, I mean the Bible. Make that your chief study; for, if rightly understood, and improved, it is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work. Apollos's character, was, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures:" It were to be wished, that both branches of the character were found in every minister; yet the last is by much the most valuable. If we are well acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel, and the arguments that support them; and understand the duties of the Christian life, the motives that inforce them, the hindrances of their practice, and the best methods of removing these hindrances; we may, by manifestation of the truth, commend ourselves to mens consciences in the sight of God; though to those who are enamoured with the enticing words of man's wisdom, and who regard sound and show more than substance, our bodily presence may appear weak, and our speech contemptible.

Be equally diligent to improve in every holy disposition. Your public work will be much affected by the frame of your spirit. If you decline in religion, your flock will fare the worse: but the better Christian you are, the more useful minister you are like to be. Seek, therefore, above all things, to grow in grace; especially in that excellent grace of love, love to God, love to Christ, and love to precious souls. For this purpose

purpose live a life of faith on the Son of God. Abide in him, and constantly depend upon him for all needful supplies of divine influence. Then will you feel your master's work a delight, not a burden; and will vigorously exert your abilities for the glory of God, and the welfare of man. Your sermons will be serious, your prayers fervent, your private conversation will naturally turn to subjects good for the use of edifying, and your life, as well as doctrine, will point out the path to the heavenly mansions.

With pure and upright intentions, dedicate yourself to the service of God in the gospel of his Son. Take the oversight of the flock, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. To use the words of another on a like occasion, * "You had better be the offscouring of all flesh, than preach to gain the vain applause of your fellow-worms. You had better beg your bread, than enter upon the ministry as a trade to live by. However those may live, who act from no higher principle, it will be dreadful dying for them, and more dreadful appearing before their judge." Expect, therefore, your reward from God only. Resolve, in divine strength, at no time to use flattering words or a cloak of covetousness, neither of man to seek glory; but e-

* President Burr's sermon at Bostwic's ordination, p. 31. Mr Bostwic, in a sermon before the synod of New-York, May 1758, printed at Philadelphia, and since reprinted at London, has justly described the influence of selfishness in perverting a gospel-ministry. The late Principal Gowdie intended to republish it here; and good judges, both of the church of England, the church of Scotland, and the Secession, wish it were more known among us.

ver to speak and act, not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth the heart.

Be diligent and faithful in the actual discharge of your office. Take heed to the ministry thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it. The longest life quickly hastens to a period; your time for service swiftly flies away, and will soon be irrecoverably past and gone; work, therefore, the work of him that sent you while it is day. The night cometh, when no man can work. Make full proof of thy ministry. Think not that performing one branch of duty will atone for neglecting another; but, in so far as time and strength permit, attend upon each in its proper season.

Allot the greatest proportion of your time to those parts of your work, public or private, that are most essential and important. Preach the word, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering. Study your sermons well, and beware of offering to God and his people that which costs you nothing. Endeavour to be thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances and dispositions of your hearers, their prejudices against religion, and the rocks on which their souls are in most hazard of being shipwrecked. Suit your discourses to their various necessities. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Seek out and set in order acceptable words; and when about to prepare for the pulpit, beg the direction of the Spirit in chusing a subject, his assistance in composing and delivering your sermon, and his blessing to render it effectual. Arrows thus fetched from heaven bid fairest

to reach the cases of your hearers, and to pierce their hearts.

Take heed to yourself as well as to your doctrine. Let your life testify, that you believe what you preach. Be wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. Fly youthful lusts: but be a pattern to believers, in words, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Win the affection of all, by an obliging courteous behaviour; and by preserving a suitable dignity of character, secure their esteem. An affable condescending manner has often recommended a bad cause; and sourness and ill-nature have raised unconquerable prejudices against many a good one. The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth. — But though meekness should temper your zeal, remember that zeal in return should enliven your meekness. You enter on the ministry in a day in which iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. The peculiar doctrines of Christianity are run down and opposed, and a tender circumspect behaviour ridiculed, by many who value themselves as standards of genius or politeness. In such a day, exert your courage to stem that torrent of infidelity and vice, which threatens to break in upon us, and destroy every thing valuable. Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Be not ashamed of Christ's words and ways in an adulterous and perverse generation; lest the Son of

man be ashamed of you, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.

These things, my dear brother, are no easy task, I hope you have often counted the cost, and with deep concern lamented your insufficiency. But know, for your encouragement, through Christ strengthening you, you may do all things. He hath said to his ministers, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." And faithful is he who hath promised, who also will do it.

If your labours should not be crowned with the desired success, be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap if you faint not. Though Israel should not be gathered, yet, if faithful in your work, you shall receive a glorious recompense. Besides, success may come when you expect it least. Be instant, therefore, in season, and out of season. He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good,

Charge to the PEOPLE.

I shall now conclude, with a short address to the people of this congregation.

Be thankful, my brethren, for a gospel-ministry. Let the infidel and profane account it a burden, not a blessing to society: but do you admire the goodness of God in an institution so wisely calculated to promote
your

your best interests. Was it not for public teaching, ignorance and vice would soon grow to so prodigious a height, that not even the form of religion would remain. — Receive with becoming affection him who is this day ordained your pastor. Consider the dignity of the office with which he is invested, and entertain him with suitable respect. Ministers are men of God; they minister in his name, and by his appointment; see, then, that your pastor be with you without fear; because he worketh the work of the Lord. Esteem him highly in love for his work's sake. Ministers would labour with better success, if they lived more in the hearts of their people. Add not, therefore, to your pastor's difficulties, by an undutiful carriage. Rather assist and strengthen him to bear up under them. Put the best construction on his words and actions, which they can possibly bear; and treat him not rudely; and vent not your spleen against him, though in his doctrine or life, lesser blemishes should appear. Curb such an insolent intemperate zeal, by reflecting on the apostle's direction: "Rebuke not an elder, but in-
"treat him as a father." Contempt cast upon faithful ministers, and injuries done them, Christ will resent as done to himself.

Forfake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is. Withdraw not from ordinances dispensed by your pastor, though his sentiments in lesser matters should differ from yours. I say, in lesser matters: for if an angel may be lawfully accursed, surely a minister may be lawfully deserted, who preaches another gospel, who lays another foundation for the hopes of guilty sinners, than God hath laid. But bring
not

not against him unjustly so heavy a charge. Remember, in this imperfect state, lesser mistakes are unavoidable, and will not vindicate your separating from him. And where a case is not extremely clear, you owe considerable deference to his judgment, as he has greater leisure than most of you for studying, and greater advantages for understanding the sacred oracles. Let therefore your pastor ever find you humble and teachable, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Come not to church with a captious quarrellsome disposition. With what heart can ministers preach, when hearers are still upon the catch, eager to pick up something with which to find fault? Act a worthier part: laying aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisy, and envying, and evil-speaking, hearken with meekness to that ingrafted word which is able to save your souls: like the noble Bereans, receive the instructions of your teacher with all readiness of mind; not yielding them, however, an implicit faith, but searching the scriptures daily, whether these things are so. In so far as they stand the test of that infallible touchstone, regard them not as the word of man, but as they are in truth, the word of the living God.

See that you reject not Christ, when by his ministers he speaketh to you from heaven. When he calls, do not refuse; when he stretcheth forth his hand, do not disregard it. Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls. While you have the light, walk in the light, lest darkness come upon you. It is but for a little ministers can be useful; ere long they must cease to preach, and you to hear. Those servants of God who now show to you the way of salvation,

salvation, must in a while resign their places; and the eye that now sees them, must see them no more. Comply, then, with their wholesome counsels, while yet you enjoy them, lest you mourn at the last, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my soul despised reproof? I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me.

Second the labours of your minister, by private endeavours, suitable to your several stations, for the good of souls. Train up your children in the way that they should go, and encourage any serious impressions made upon them. When discipline is exercised against open offenders, show that the honour of God, and the happiness of precious souls, lie nearer your hearts than the ease and reputation of any man. The efficacy of church-censures will much depend on your conduct towards those who fall under them. Have no company with such, that they may be ashamed: and if they will not hear the church, let them be to you as heathen men and publicans.

And when you are allowed the nearest access to a throne of grace, and feel your hearts in the most devout and heavenly frame, wrestle and make supplication for your minister, that his own soul may prosper and be in health, that the presence of God may accompany him in all his ministrations, and that when he plants and waters, God himself may give the increase.

May his doctrine drop as the rain, and his speech distil as the dew: And may the soul of every one of you be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.

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